Youth Development Ages and Stages: Programming to Meet the Developmental Needs of Youth

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Youth Development Ages & Stages

Age-Appropriate Programming =
Good Educational Design & Delivery

Age-appropriate – lessons and activities are well suited for the developmental stages of the audience

Characteristics of Development

- Physical
- Intellectual or Cognitive
- Social
- Emotional

Principles of Development

- Development is orderly, not random.
- Development is a continuous and gradual process.
- Each stage of life has “jobs” that need to be mastered.
- Youth are limited by their developmental capacities.

If Programs & Activities are Developmentally Age-Appropriate:

1. Learning will be more fun and engaging.
2. Youth will experience greater success in their learning.
3. Youth will build on past experiences and be ready for new ones.

Youth Developmental Stages

- Early Childhood: Ages 6-8, Grades 1-3
- Middle Childhood: Ages 9-11, Grades 4-6
- Young Teens: Ages 12-14, Grades 7-9
- Teens: Ages 15-18, Grades 9-12

Early Childhood Characteristics (Ages 6-8)

Physical

Mastering physical skills; undeveloped fine motor skills

Intellectual

Concrete thinkers based in reality; can’t multi-task well

Social

Learning how to be friends; boy/girl separation

Emotional

Self-centered; sensitive to criticism/failure

Early Childhood (Ages 6-8)

Implications:

- Provide clear rules, boundaries & structure; keep it simple.
- They're active! Need short activities (15-20 minutes max).
- Be prepared for messy!
- Small, mixed-gender groups encourage social interaction.
- Be positive and encouraging. (Silly is good too!)
- Promote success and cooperation.
- Allow for exploration and inquiry.
- Focus on process, not final product.

Middle Childhood Characteristics (Ages 9-11)

Physical

Have trouble sitting still. Females mature before males

Intellectual

Learning to think abstractly

Want to find own solutions, not rely on others for answers

Social

Enjoy being in clubs/groups; prefer same sex groups

Emotional

Moody! Weak sense of individual identity; Mimic others

Beginning to question authority but still want guidance

Middle Childhood (Ages 9-11)

Implications:

- Need a variety of brief hands-on activities where they are up and moving, not sitting and listening.
- Provide simple, short directions.
- Same sex pairs or small groups will net better participation.
- Avoid competition between boys and girls.
- Don’t compare them to each other.
- Help them identify their strengths.
- Reassure and praise generously.

Young Teen Characteristics (Ages 12-14)

Physical

Many physical changes; growth spurts common

Intellectual

Gaining study skills, developing abstract thinking

Set goals based on their needs

Young Teen Characteristics (Ages 12-14)

Social

Looking for activities involving opposite sex

Look more to peers than parents

Emotional

It’s all about them! Strive to be independent, yet want and need adults’ help

Young Teens (Ages 12-14)

Implications:

- Need active learning that include social time.
- Can work on individual goals, not just group goals.
- Need opportunities to demonstrate individual skills and talents.
- Don’t criticize or compare youth physically.
- Establish climate that is conducive to peer support.

Young Teens (Ages 12-14)

Implications:

- Let them make decisions and evaluation outcomes.
- Let them assume responsibility – expect them to follow through.
- Help them find solutions on their own by providing supervision without interference.
- Praise progress and completion towards personal goals.
- Provide career exploration activities.

Teen Characteristics (Ages 15-18)

<u>Physical</u>

Continued concern about body image

Smaller range in size and maturity among peers

<u>Intellectual</u>

Are mastering abstract thinking

Can imagine impact of present behavior on future

Enjoy demonstrating acquired knowledge

Will lose patience with meaningless activities

Teen Characteristics (Ages 15-18)

Social

Search for intimacy; test sexual attractiveness by flirting

Prefer to work with their own age group; also enjoy mentoring or teaching younger kids

Emotional

Desire respect; wants adult leadership roles

Accepting their own uniqueness but still seek approval from peers

Developing own set of values and beliefs

Teens (Ages 15-18)

Implications

- Similar to those for 12-14 year olds:
  - ✓Provide real-life problems to solve.
  - ✓Let them make decisions & evaluate outcomes.
  - ✓Career exploration is very important; post high school choices are imminent.
- Avoid comments that criticize or compare youth.
- Establish climate conducive to peer support.
- Encourage service learning, addressing real-life problem-solving situations.

Teens (Ages 15-18)

Implications:

- Allow teens to select, plan, conduct, and evaluate an activity or experience; hold accountable for the success or failure of their plans.
- Provide experiences and activity choices that challenge the skills and abilities of youth.
- Help them learn what their strengths and weaknesses are.
- Provide activities and educational experiences in mixed groups.

Age-Appropriate Programming

- Meet them where they are.
- Create activities/lessons where they can succeed.
- Maintain structure, boundaries, rules & expectations suitable for their developmental stage.
- Foster positive peer interaction but be sensitive to the needs of the age group.
- Hands-on activities and experiential learning opportunities are key to working with any age.
- Learning should be fun!

Youth Development Ages & Stages

Following these guidelines will ensure the greatest learning by youth!

One hundred years from now, it will not matter what my bank account was, how big my house was, or what kind of car I drove. But the world may be little better, because I was important in the life of a child." Forest Witcraft